Robert Burns, Scotland's Man by James Leatham.

I have presumed to imagine that I have something to say of Robert Burns, partly because I have approached certain great life-problems in a spirit somewhat similar to that in which he approached them, but mainly because I have a whole-hearted admiration for his work, and do not feel called upon to apologise for him, either as man or author, as most of his biographers and critics have seen fit to do.

Burns was a Jacobin and a Jacobite. He was in sympathy with the principles of that great upheaval the First French Revolution, and although as a Government official he was not supposed to have any political opinions, he on more than one occasion declared in favour of great and far-reaching changes. In fact he was brought to book for his openly-expressed republican sympathies, more particularly when they took form in the gift of a brass cannonade to the French Republic, and to keep his employment he had to pass through the Valley of Humiliation and make more or less profession of loyalty to the ignoble House of Hanover, whose members he, in common with most people of liberal sentiment despised for good reason.

His Politics.

On the social or economic side, the life of a rural community represented life as a whole to him, and we can see from the poem of 'The Twa Dogs' that he by no means regarded the ordinary system of landlord and tenant as an ideally perfect or even moderately satisfactory arrangement. He scathingly depicted the idle, enervating life of the landlord class. He made his gentleman dog Caesar launch out against the mischievous pursuits of absentee landlords ' 'mang groves o'myrtle' abroad, and the sting of the diatribe has not lost its point today; for with our facilities for rapid travel, and the denationalising of Scottish landlords, who spend most of their time and their tenants' money in London and abroad, the evil of absenteeism is even greater now than it was in Burns's day. In the speech of Caesar 'poor tenant bodies, scant o' cash,' were represented as having to 'thole a factor's snash,' and, needless to say, the system being what it is, factors are the same race today as they were then.

His Jacobitism as such probably did not mean very much. It would be partly a poet's sentiment for an exiled and unfortunate house, identified during long centuries with the history of the nation, and whose members possessed a charm of personality of which the first three Georges appear from all accounts to have been singularly destitute. For the rest, Burns's Jacobitism would be the symbol of his attachment to all that was best in the old world and of his protest against much that was sordid in the world about him. His leaning would be towards aristocracy, not as an aristocracy of birth, but as an aristocracy of breeding, of feeling, and of culture. His friends were lairds and noblemen rather than men engaged in commercial pursuits. The latter he probably found out of sympathy with him, and their interests and their outlook upon

life would be repugnant to him. Would wish to increase the number of men of liberal feeling and refined sentiment, and to do this he would be of the opinion that great social changes required to be carried out. His millennium,

When man to men the warld o'er

Should brithers be for a' that.

was not surely to be secured by mere preaching and teaching, but by actual legislative changes. His present to a friend of Delolme's book on 'The Constitution' showed that he was a student of politics as well as a maker of verse. He admired the fine manners, the open-mindedness, and the good taste of his aristocratic friends, and he wished to give 'the poor o'er-laboured wight' the leisure and the education which could alone render brotherhood possible between him and the 'birkie ca'd a lord.'

The Perfervid Scot.

But apart altogether from the Social-Democracy of Burns, he is on the purely human side the best type of Scotsman I know. We hear and have long heard much about 'the canny Scot.' Far be it from me to pretend that 'there ain't no sich a person.' What I claim is, however, that the headlong, fiery, warm-hearted, tender, generous, romantic Scot is the best type; and Robert Burns stands as the embodiment of much that is best in this class. The canny Scot—slow, under-engined, with imperfect sympathies and no vision—is the type from which Scotland suffers most.

Why has Scotland so few Great Poets?

We do well to make the most of our great poet; for of the very greatest we have but the one; and considering that we have so many of the elements of poetry in us and about us, this seems not a little strange. England has produced many great poets; yet the average Englishman is rather stolid, while his surroundings, tame and domestic as Byron rightly called them, would appear to give but the minimum of poetic stimulus. Here is a problem. If 'Caledonia, stern and wild,' be meet nurse for poetic children, how is it that against the great galaxy of English poets of the very first order we have only the name of Burns to advance.

The Celtic element in literature is said to count for much. In poetry especially it is held by so good a judge as Matthew Arnold to supply the salt of imagination. And since, in addition to fit surroundings, the Scottish people derive so much of their national temperament from a Celtic source, it seems strange that of the very best poetry we should produce so little. Can it be possible that poetry has been discouraged in Scotland? Hag-ridden by a sour theology, harassed by the desire to make and to save money, spending our lives in the struggle with poor land and a harsh climate, is it possible that we have cold-shouldered the making of verse as a vain and futile expenditure of time and talent, fit only for feckless cranks who can neither fish, farm, nor sell a shop? I dislike giving an answer to the question, because

I dread the possible character of the answer, But I am tolerably certain, for instance, that had Gilbert Burns been asked as to the value of his great brother's work during the lifetime of Robert, canny Gilbert would have preferred that Robert should succeed less as a poet and more as a farmer. With all respect to the useful calling of the farmer, I say: How unspeakably grateful we should be that Burns gave the rein to his genius and refused to give his whole soul to barley, oats, and bestial!

We are told that he worked hard—on the farm of Mossgiel at any rate—and I think that is very likely true. He would be conscious of owning a divided allegiance between farming and verse-making, and, proud and sensible as he was, he would doubtless work with feverish zeal, as if to make up for the circumstance that the better part of his thoughts strayed from agriculture to literature. 'The Vision' shows that Burns himself had misgivings at times about his verse-making, and it is well for Scotland and literature that the artist mastered the husband and father, that prudential cares were forgotten, and that Burns could not, even if he would, give up the courtship of the Muse for the service of the main chance.

The Apologists.

I have no wish unduly to glorify the profession of letters. It takes all sorts of people to make a world; and I am sure that many of the people who cultivate literature and make verse especially would be much better employed at the making of good honest boots, for the excellent reason that they have obviously no vocation for writing. The work of Burns has encouraged so many writers of doggerel Scottish verse, many of them feckless creatures, full of absurd notions as to the importance of their 'work,' that the word poet has come to be associated with crankiness or weak-mindedness; and sensible men, if they confess to the making of rhymes at all, do so with a certain shyness, as if they were confessing to a vice or a failing. Robert Burns, I strongly hold, suffers to some extent by this widely-diffused feeling regarding poets. Even in the height of the enthusiasm at a Burns celebration, observations of an apologetic character will be made by the orators in speaking of the career and genius of the poet. I have noticed, moreover, that many clergymen and almost all moral precisians, refuse to identify themselves with the Burns cult, and one is profoundly disappointed to find so fine a man and so good a poet as Dr. George MacDonald lamenting over the backslidings of our national poet in a mere popular lecture.

Should the failings of Burns not be touched upon at all, then? it may be asked. Is a man entitled to lead any kind of life he pleases so long as he is a great poet ? By no means. All that I am contending is that there has been vastly too much of moral lamentation over Burns. I for one desire that the judgment of Burns's work should be more impersonal, and that if we do hark back, as we cannot help occasionally doing, to the character of the poet we should display some little moral insight. Instead of condemning or affecting to pity and regret, I strongly hold that we should recognise that in Burns's case it is necessary only to explain. It is possible to praise the beauty of the Psalms without mourning over the frequent, long-continued, serious

backslidings of David ; and if that be possible in the case of the one poet it ought to be easy in the case of the other.*

**A clerical correspondent has pointed out that "probably no single part of the Book of Psalms owes its composition to David himself," and that "if so, your comparison between Burns and David has no weight at all." I have allowed the sentence to stand as originally written, partly because I think that David, the harpist and improvisator, is extremely likely to have had a hand in the Psalms, but chiefly because the point of my argument is that the very people who forgive David for the constructive murder of Bathsheba's husband refuse to forgive Burns, a greater poet, who has no such crime at his door.*

When we see a fine picture, listen to a great symphony, or meet with a piece of good work of any kind, it ought to be possible to admire, to try to understand the thing, to get at the full meaning of its producer, and to explain that meaning with what gift of sympathetic and critical exposition we may possess—all this without wishing to pry into the character of the artist.

Practice and Precept.

Burns, it seems to me suffers largely from the prevalent acceptance of the theory that a man should not preach what he cannot practise—a most pernicious doctrine. Were such a view tenable it would mean that if a writer's or a preacher's practice were bad; it would be his duty to make his preaching or teaching conform to the wickedness of his life. This would obviously make bad worse—narrowing down the standard of our aim to the measure of our achievement, Men have a higher and lower nature. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Reason would lead them one way, but overmastering impulse drags them another. In their rational moods, however, they recognise and deplore the evil of their ways, and to forbid the drunkard to condense drunkenness, or the sensualist to depict the degrading influences of libertinism, is to refuse to accept the testimony of those who can speak with most authority and with deepest and truest feeling.

I cannot help thinking that many people seek to extenuate their lack of appreciation of Burns's work by falling foul of his character, and I can conceive of no more immoral moral perversity than that. For how stands the case? Here we have a great man whose memory suffers at the hands of pharisaical detractors, not because of his foibles, but in reality because of his genius and his work for Scotland, for literature, and for humanity. Had Robert Burns been a common ploughman he and his failings would long since have been forgotten. But because Burns, while he had no more than the average vices of the men of his time, had in him a divine essence, both moral and intellectual, which caused him to make light of the ordinary prudential cares of mankind, and unselfishly give his time and thoughts and genius to the making of a great book ‘for puir auld Scotland's sake,’ his memory must with some people occupy a place in the pillory so long as his book is read.

Let it be recognised once for all that, to be the poet he was, Burns had to be just precisely the man he was. He had the defects of his qualities, and those defects were not accidental, but inevitable. With his great, susceptible nervous organization, strong to feel rather than to resist, he was at the mercy of every gust of passion and every monition of the beautiful that touched him. The very imagination which enabled him to conceive and give shape to that tremendous company in Alloway Kirk, with its awful surroundings and paraphernalia—the piping Devil in the winnock-bunker, the dead in their open coffins holding lights in their cold hands, the murderer's bones in gibbet-irons, the span-tang, wee, unchristened bairns, the gasping thief, 'new cuttit frae the rape,' the tomahawks, the garter that had strangled a babe, the murder-crusted scimitars, the parricide's knife, with the blood and hair upon it, and all the details of the witches' dance—this very imagination caused him to make a goddess of every other young and handsome woman he met, with consequences of which we have heard only too much.

Burns, then, had to be the man he was; and as the consequences of his acts have now lost all significance regarded in the light of an injury to any man or woman, let us remember his intrigues only as an interesting feature in the psychology of a great man, and be glad and thankful for the genius that represents a gain to literature that has no serious alloy or offset. The old lusts are dead. The jealous resentment of Jean Armour at the incontinence of her husband probably did not long survive the injuries inflicted: and having met some of the men and women who live today as the descendants of the poet's illicit loves—douce, kindly, clever folk all of them—I experience great difficulty in taking seriously the irregularity of their great ancestor. Burns may not have been 'good' in the sacrosanct sense, but he was good for something, whereas of many of those that are 'good' it may fairly be said that they are good for nothing.

Scotland's Man.

The claim I have to advance on behalf of Robert Burns is, not alone that he is Scotland's greatest poet, but that he is Scotland's greatest man. Not only her biggest man in sheer natural intellectual power, but her greatest man as regards the influence he has exercised and the purity and singleness of the motives by which he was actuated in his work. The only names fit to be mentioned in the same breath with his are those of Wallace and Bruce on the one hand and that of Walter Scott on the other. It is not necessary to decry one of our national heroes in order to extol another. To distinguish and appraise is not to decry. But I know of no way in which one can reason save by analogy and contrast, and in the present case the analogy and the contrast have to be between individuals.

In comparison with Wallace, Bruce, and Scott, then, the transcendent greatness of Burns at once emerges. Wallace initiated and led a momentous national rebellion; but he was moved to his great work primarily by resentment. He was a strong man, a brave man, and a good general; but the motive of his action on behalf of Scotland was

less evidently love of Scotland and Scotsmen than hatred of English and the English. Bruce, again, actually fought against his fellow-countrymen until he was taunted by the English with sitting down at table to eat with the blood of his brethren on his hands; and in the last resort there were a crown and a kingdom to be won as the price of successful revolt. Bruce was brave, sagacious, magnanimous—by birth and character a king among men; but it is impossible to deny that in his work for Scotland he was largely moved by self-interest. As for Sir Walter Scott, kindly, honest, good-natured, quixotically honourable as he was, one is bound to confess that through all his literary work he was mightily concerned about the money reward of it, and that much of his slipshod from pure haste of production, begotten largely of this desire to make money. In this connection one remembers that he turned from the making of poetry to the making of prose because the success of Byron made the sale of 'Marmions' and 'Ladies of the Lake' less profitable. Burns, on the other hand, was the consummate literary artist, having the delights of literary creation as almost his only reward. Scott was an artist indeed—an artist almost in spite of himself—but certainly a literary adventurer, concerned more than enough about his mansion, his planting, and his interests as a territorial nabob. All of these three great Scotsmen, moreover, began their work with the social advantages in their favour, as Burns did not.

Burns's work was not only purely disinterested, but was done with a combination of conditions against him. He was imperfectly schooled. He was born into the peasant class, with its limited interests, and grinding hardening toil. He lived in an artificial century, when the accepted rules and conventions of verse-making almost forbade the selection of natural themes and put fetters upon natural forms of poetic expression. Yet Burns is nevertheless, in the bulk of his work, one of the most natural of poets, and again and again showed his strong good taste by refusing to alter his lines to please conventional critics. These he described as 'cut-throat bandits on the path of fame,' and when we read of some of the alterations they suggested, we assent, with disgust or laughter, to the truth of the characterisation.

His whole life was spent in a struggle with unfriendly Fortune. Father and sons struggled long at Mount Oliphant and Lochlea, and the former died bankrupt. Robert and his brother struggled unsuccessfully together at Mossgiel, and the struggle was continued by them not very successfully apart. The poet might well have sent the muses packing; but to the last he refused to be persuaded of the necessity of giving his best thoughts to the making of money. The sole pecuniary results of the writings of a lifetime were £900. Yet while working as a gauger, at a salary of £70 a-year, he refused to write for the 'poetical department' of a London newspaper, although the editor offered him £52 a-year as salary, and although he could have done the work in his spare time. He would woo the muse, he would wait upon her, he would produce rapidly when the fit was upon him; but he would not cudgel the muse. He would not undertake to write so much a week whether the mood was upon him or not. At another time his friend Thomson, for whose collection of Scottish song some of

Burns's best lyrics were written, sent him a fee of £5. The poet warmly indicated that he had better not repeat the remittance, saying that his work was either worth more or worth nothing at all. His behaviour in this respect forms a striking commentary on that of the swarm of hack writers, now more than ever numerous, who, without any excuse of necessity (which Burns might well have pled), drain out the dregs and skim off the scum of their brains for 'cold, unfeeling ore,' as Burns called it.

His Personality.

So much for Burns's motives, the difficulties he surmounted, the conditions of his inspiration. But what of his personality? Let his contemporaries speak. The Duchess of Gordon said he was the only man who 'carried her off her feet.' Ramsay of Ochtertyre wrote:— 'I have been in the company of many men of genius, but never witnessed such flashes of intellectual brightness as from him, the impulse of the moment, sparks of celestial fire.' Maria Riddell, who knew Burns well and who was a good judge, said: 'I hesitate not to affirm—and in vindication of my opinion I appeal to all who had the advantage of personal acquaintance with him—that poetry was actually not his forte... none have ever outshone Burns in the charm, the sorcery I would almost call it, of fascinating conversation... The rapid lightnings of his eye were always the harbingers of some flash of genius... His voice alone could improve upon the magic of his eye.' Sir Walter Scott's opinion is that he 'never saw a man in company with his superiors in station or information more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment. His address to females* was extremely deferential, with a turn either to the pathetic or the humorous which engaged their attention particularly.' Burns's conversation, according to Lockhart, who had the report of auditors, 'was the most remarkable thing about him.'

**Scott here does not mean cows, mares, or bitches, but women. He belonged to the generation which called a person a 'party,' and a man's wife his 'lady.'*

His Work.

I have spoken of his disinterestedness. I have allowed others to speak of the charm and power of his personality. Of his influence how shall I speak? I know of no patriot, no warrior, no statesman, no philanthropist, no scientific inventor of our nation who has done as much for Scotland as has the ploughman bard. 'Give me to make the songs of a nation, and let who will make its laws,' said Fletcher of Saltoun. Appealing alike to gentle and simple, to rich and poor, to men and women, to old and young, he has quickened the imagination of his countrymen, has revealed and has deepened their humour, has cultivated their faculty of swift portraiture and dry, sly fun, has made us better known to each other as men, and better known to all the world as a nation. We see Nature through his eyes, for he has trained our perceptive faculties by revealing to us the workings of his own. We can never be so cruel to the mouse, the

hare, or the birds since, like a modern musically articulate Francis of Assissi, he has taught us to consider them as sentient creatures, having loves and joys and hopes and fears and sorrows like ourselves. We could surely never be wantonly destructive with flowers after reading the exquisitely tender ‘Address to a Daisy,’ in which the poet coos and croons and melts over the ‘wee, modest,crimson-tipped flower’ like a mother over her hurt and suffering child. We can never be so bigoted or irreverent as we should have been had we not read the profane and ludicrous prayer of Holy Willie. ‘Auld Lang Syne’ is our song of peace, ‘Scots wha hae’ is our song of war, and the former at least will be sung as long as any dialect of the Saxon tongue is understood.

His aphorisms have passed into the very warp and woof of common speech. The sybarite is reminded that

Pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, Its bloom is shed,
Or like the snow falls in the river,

A moment white then melts for ever.
The man who would be independent remembers that ‘the rank is but the guinea-stamp—the man's the gowd an' a' that.’ The dullest hoyden is taken by storm with the audacious statement regarding Nature that

Her 'prentice han' she tried on man,
And then she made the lasses o.

It matters not that Burns was not the first to formulate the conception. The author of ‘Cupid's Whirligig’ (1630) has it that ‘man was made when Nature was but an apprentice, but woman when she was a skilfull mistress of her arte.’ Burns has made the conceit his own, has cast it in an unforgettable form of words, and it is highly probable that he never saw ‘Cupid's Whirligig.’ The despised lover takes heart of grace from the lesson of ‘Duncan Gray.’ The henpecked husband reconsiders his position at the reading of ‘My Spouse, Nancy.’ Those who would be prone to flunkeyism are admonished that

A king can mak' a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might.

The litigious and quarrelsome receive the homely counsel:

Then let us not like snarling tykes,
In wrangling be dividit,
Till slap come in an unco loon
And wi' a rung decide it.

In his alternating qualities of vituperative power and delicate, melting tenderness, Burns reminds one of a great steam hammer, equal alike to the crushing of tons of rock or to the cracking of a nut without touching the kernel. A man of all moods, he has the few swift strokes, plain yet perfect, for almost every occasion.

The best laid schemes of mice and men
Gang aft agley.
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.

O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oorsels as ithers see us.

The heart aye's the pairt aye
That maks us richt or wrang,

Human bodies are sic fools,
For a' their colleges and schools,
That when nae real ills perplex 'em
They mak' enow themselves to vex 'em.

It's hardly in a body's power
To keep at times frae bein' sour
To see how things are shar't;
How best o' chiel's are whiles in want,
While coofs on countless thousands rant,
And kenna how to ware't.

His Proverbial Philosophy.

His proverbial philosophy is in extent and aptness second only to that of Shakespeare, and what it loses in didactic splendour it gains in homely portableness as compared with the aphorisms of the English poet. If it be the function of the poet to give a local habitation and a name to the vague and fleeting fancies of ordinary mortals, surely no poet has fulfilled that function to a larger number of his fellow-men than Robert Burns has done. Where shall we find shorter expression given to the truth that there is discipline and wisdom. in trial and trouble than in the lines ?

Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce,
Nor make our scanty pleasure less
By pining at our state;
And even should misfortune come,
I here who sit hae met wi' some,
An's thaakfu' for them yet.
They gie the wit o' age to youth,
They lat us ken oorsel;
They mak' us see the naked truth,
The real guid an' ill.

Though losses and crosses
Be lessons right severe,
There's wit there ye'll get there
Ye'll find nae other where.

And where shall we find resignation with the reverses of fortune more aptly enjoined than in the same poem?—

Mair speirna, nor fearna,
Auld age ne'er mind a feg;
The last o't, the warst o't,
Is only but to beg.
To lie in barns at e'en,
When banes are crazed and bluid is thin,
Is doubtless great distress!
Yet then content could mak' us blest,
E'en then sometimes we'd snatch a taste
Of truest happiness.
The honest heart that's free frae a'
Intended fraud or guile,
However fortune kick the ba',
Has aye some cause to smile.
And mind still yell find still
A comfort this nae sma'.
Nae mair, then, we'll care, then,
Nae farther can we fa'.

To the commonest sentiment he gives the glamour of classic expression, intensifying the joy of those that rejoice and deepening the despondency of those that sorrow by the verbal reflex of his own feeling. The love-sick swain has the pleasant pain of his malady increased when he reads the song of ‘Menie’ .

Again rejoicing Nature sees
Her robe assume its vernal hues.
Her heavy locks wave in the breeze,
All freshly steeped in morning dews.

And man I still on Menie dote,
And bear the scorn that’s in her e’e?
For it’s jet, jet black, and it’s like a hawk,
And it winna lat a body be.

In vain to me the cowslips blew,
In vain to me the violets spring;
In vain to me, in glen or shave,
The mavis and the lintwhite sing.

The merry ploughboy cheers his team,
Wi' joy the tentie seedsman stalks;

But life to me's a weary dream,
A dream of ane that never wauks.

The wanton coot the water skims,
Amang the reeds the ducklings cry,
The stately swan majestic swims,
And everything is blest but I.

The shepherd steeks his faulding slap,
And owre the moorland whistles shrill;
Wi wild, unequal, wandering step,
I meet him on the dewy hill.

And when the lark, 'tween light and dark,
Blithe waukens by the daisy's side,
And mounts and sings on flittering wings,
A was-worn ghaist I hameward glide.

Come, Winter, with thine angry howl,
And raging bend the naked tree;
Thy gloom will soothe my cheerless soul,
When Nature all is sad like me!

And maun I still on Menie dote,
And bear the scorn that's in her e'e?
For it's jet, jet black, and it's like a hawk,
And it winna lat a body be.

In ‘My Nannie's awa’ we have not only the same passionate feeling, the same concentration of meaning, the same characteristic of a picture in almost every line, but we have the same ending in which the mood of the lover is identified with the mood of Nature;

Come, Autumn sae pensive in yellow and grey.
And soothe me wi' tidings o' Nature's decay;
The dark, dreary, Winter and wild-driving maw
Alane can delight me, now Nannies awa.

But Burns can teach us scolding invective u well. The angry prophecy of the Auld Brig as to the fate of the New is weaker er than certain other passages of invective in Burns; but it is more quotable in a mixed gathering, and it is, as Carlyle says, a veritable Poussin-picture of a deluge. Says the Auld Brig to the New: -

Conceited gawk! Puffed up wi’ windy pride!
This mony a year I've stood the good and tide;
And though wi’ crazy eild I’m sair forfairn,
I'll be a brig when ye're a shapeless cairn!

As yet ye little ken aboot the matter,
But twa-three winters will inform ye better.
When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains,
Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains;
When from the hills where spring the brawling Coil,
Or stately Lugar's mossy fountains boil,
Or where the Greenock winds his moorland course,
Or haunted Garpal draws his feeble source
Aroused by blustering winds and spotting thowes,
In mony a torrent down his snaw-broo rowes;
While crashing ice, borne on the roaring spate,
Sweep dams, and mills, and brigs a' to the gate;
And from Glenbuck down to the Ratton Key,
Auld Ayr is just one lengthened tumbling sea,—

Then, says the Auld Brig, in a transport of mingled fury and glee at the prospect it has conjured up for the New Brig;

Then down ye'll hurl, deil nor ye never rise!
And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies.

The man who wants a better mouthful than 'gumlie jaups' would surely be a tremendous person to fall out with.

But Burns sometimes gains his point and produces the desired effect with a comparatively light touch. When I think of the leap of the fiddles and the swish of the dancers in a ballroom I immediately remember the lines in 'Mary Morison'—

Yestreen when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha'.

That is the whole scene. In the fine stanzas describing the ball held at Brussels on the Eve of Waterloo, Byron never once comes near the sudden effect of these two lines.

The Magnificent 'Success' of Burns's Life.

In Burns we have the best type of Scotsman, and we have that type at its best. He is interested in religion and politics because he recognises that, for weal or woe, religion and politics are big and serious things. He is a heretic in both because he holds great and generous conceptions as to man's destiny, both here and hereafter. Despite the Calvinism of his time, he 'trusts the universal plan will all protect.' Conversant with history, he feels that the progress of the past is an earnest of still greater progress in the future. But, having some conception of the insignificance of the individual in the great sum of things, his sense of proportion saves him alike from exaggerated conceit and from exaggerated seriousness. His mental balance is preserved by his strong sense of humour, which is by no means an unfailing characteristic of poets.

On most of the great questions, the problems for all time, he has something to say, and so far as those questions can be adequately discussed in verse, his pronouncements upon them still hold the field. In short, if there be anything that Scotland as Scotland has to say to the world on the common concerns of life, Burns is so far her man to say it.

This is the age of commerce, the reign of the successful business man, and I take delight in doing honour so far as I can to one who had as little as possible in common with the successful business man. To many of these, I doubt not, Burns's life appears to be a failure. Let a man give his attention to literature, and even if he do good work in it, his commercially-minded friends will vote him queer if, while failing to make it pay, he persists in following it up. On the other hand, let him or another write the most arrant piffle—stuff which the writer himself admits is nonsense—and if he can make money by it he will be voted shrewd and capable. Every year as the 25th comes round one hears pointless complaints about the way in which Burns was treated by his contemporaries while alive. There are some superstitions—'some popular delusions'—that will never die. So far as literature is concerned, the average man, like the Bourbons, 'learns nothing and forgets nothing.' I grant that the world allows its Morgans Carnegies to have a better time in some respects than it permits to its Burneses and Chattertons. But it is only crass perversity which seeks to make out that Burns was neglected or was a failure in his own day. He always 'poor.' But he was great enough to be able to do without money wealth. Although he could write and feel 'Man was made to mourn,' I think it extremely probable that he crowded plain pleasure and high artistic delight into his life in a degree which more than compensated him for the loss of the business man's sober satisfaction in that he is doing well. To hear the fat and flatulent prosperous man professing to pity Burns for the alleged ill-treatment he received is for the most part merely amusing, though it does become tiresome during a few days in January each year. Your pity, gentlemen, is just a trifle superfluous, even if it did not come so late in the day.

The Artist's Satisfaction.

Burns was the successful lover of several really fine women, making due allowance for his poet's idealisation of them. He was feted in Edinburgh and honoured by the highest in the land, and he kept all his best friends to the end. Above all—though this is what the non-artistic capacity will not see—Burns tasted during many years the sweetest joys of literary creative effort, which alone is its own exceeding great reward. For myself, I confess I have nothing but hopeless, admiring envy for the man who was found on the banks of the Nith declaiming for the first time, with tears of joy, the immortal lines of 'Tam o' Shanter.' Burns had his full taste of the sweet and the bitter sweet of life. I cannot see that he could have lived his life otherwise than as he did. Even his moods of profoundest melancholy were turned to account for the purposes of his amend, and as an artist he would then be most happy when his lines were best calculated to boot sadness in others.

If those who affect to pity Burns could crowd as much happiness into the square hour as he did, they would not be the dull fellows we know them for. As it is, they will pursue their beaverisms with prosaic success, and, in order to live, will destroy the reasons for living; and when they go hence at the end of their long tedious lives they will soon be forgotten. Posterity will know them only from a graveyard epitaph, and history will all be read as if they had not been, Whereas Burns is the idol of a people; the spokesman, along with Shakespeare, of all Saxon-speaking humanity; and, as already said, had on the whole a thoroughly good time while he lived. To those critics I say: Read Burns if you will, gentlemen. Understand him if you can. Appreciate him if you must. But your pity! He did not need it while he lived, and still less does he need it now.